

Week Ending Friday, September 26, 1997

The President's Radio Address

September 20, 1997

Good morning. We're living in a time of great hope and optimism and prosperity in our Nation. Our economy is booming. We've cut the deficit 80 percent and passed a plan to balance the budget. Crime and welfare rolls are dropping. But perhaps most important for the long-term future of America, this has been a banner year for education, too.

Our historic balanced budget is truly an education budget, with the largest new investment in education since 1965; from more children in Head Start to our America Reads program that will mobilize a million volunteers to make sure all our children can read when they leave the third grade, to putting computers in all our classrooms and libraries by the year 2000.

We've also had the largest increased investment in helping people to go on to college since the passage of the GI bill 50 years ago, the increased Pell grant scholarships and work study positions, the HOPE scholarship to help pay for the first 2 years of college and other tax credits and IRA's, all these things will truly open the doors of college to all who are willing to work for it for the first time in American history.

But we can't rest. We have more to do in education to fully prepare our children to seize the opportunities of the new century. And especially, we all know we have to do more to improve the quality of public education.

I have called upon all Americans to leave politics at the schoolhouse door and to work together to provide our children with the best education in the world. And many have answered that call. Just last week, the Senate voted overwhelmingly, 87-12, for voluntary national tests in fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math, bringing us an important step closer to setting high national standards of academic excellence that will ensure that

no child leaves our schools without mastering the basics.

Unfortunately, two events in recent days have jeopardized this essential progress in education. First, the same forces that have resisted education reform and high standards and accountability for years in the House of Representatives have voted against developing the national standards we need to challenge students, improve teaching, empower parents, and increase accountability in our schools. In effect, they've cast their votes against better schools and for a status quo that is failing too many of our children.

Second, the Senate narrowly passed an amendment that would undermine some of our most successful efforts in the last 5 years to strengthen our schools. National efforts to bring more charter schools to more communities, to bring computers to every classroom, to create safe and drug-free schools across our country, all these would virtually be abolished by an amendment which would throw all our education funds into a pot and distribute it in an arbitrary way to the States.

Today, I'm going to see firsthand just how high these stakes are. I'm visiting the San Carlos Charter Learning Center in California, one of many charter schools across our country and in the State of California that are bringing new life, new energy, and new creativity into public education. Charter schools are established by educators with less redtape, but higher expectations. Students must choose to attend them, and they exist only as long as they're doing a good job.

Our administration has been helping charter schools to get started all across our country, and our balanced budget contains funds to establish hundreds more of them all around America. This is an innovation we cannot afford to lose. Making sure every 8-year-old can read, every 12-year-old can log onto the Internet, every 18-year-old can go on to college, these are national goals, and

we must support national efforts to meet them.

In the 21st century, our children must have a world-class education. We must strengthen our schools, raise our standards, insist that our students master the basics, and demand excellence at every level. So if Congress sends me partisan legislation that denies our children high national standards or weakens our national commitment to stronger schools, I'll have to give it the failing grade it deserves, and I'll veto it.

Bringing vital change and progress to our schools will take courage and the steadfast commitment of all. But throughout our history, we have always risen to the challenge of building better futures for our children. If we all work together, we are up to the task today as well.

Thank you.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 3:16 p.m. on September 18 in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on September 20.

Remarks in a Roundtable Discussion on Charter Schools at the San Carlos Charter Learning Center in San Carlos, California

September 20, 1997

The President. Thank you very much. First, thank all of you for coming here today and sharing your Saturday morning. I thank the superintendent for his really marvelous remarks. He talked about all the things that we have in common. I saw a living symbol of his dedication to education above all else and one thing that we have in common that he didn't mention. If you look closely at his tie, you will see it is a pattern of golf balls and tees. [*Laughter*] And on this beautiful Saturday morning he's here with us. [*Laughter*]

Let me thank your instructional coordinator, too, for being here, leaving her 11-day-old baby. I would like to see the 11-day-old baby, but I think it's—where's the baby? A wise mother leaves the baby outside. [*Laughter*]

Hillary and I are delighted to be here. And I want to spend most of my time just at this

panel today. But I thank all of you for coming because I believe in charter schools, and I believe they are an important part of helping us to lift our standards and renew our schools and achieve the kind of educational excellence that all of our children need as we move into the 21st century.

I congratulate the San Carlos Learning Center for being the first of its kind in California, which obviously makes it among the very first in the United States.

Let me just give you a little, brief personal history here. When I was Governor of my State for 12 years, I spent a great deal of time working on school reform—and so did Hillary—spent lots of time in the schools, talking to teachers, talking to parents, talking to students, dealing with issues of curriculum development and teacher training and all those things. And when we were active in the 1980's, the State of Minnesota became the first State in the country to pass a public school choice law, to give parents and their children more choice among the public schools their children attended. I think we were the second State to pass that law. And we used it quite a lot.

Then, when I began to run for President in 1991, Minnesota became the first State in the country again to pass a charter school law, recognizing that sometimes it wasn't enough just to give the parents and the students choices but that we needed to give the educators and the parents and the students with whom they worked options to create schools that fit the mission needed by the children in the area, and that if you gave them options and held them accountable, we might be able to do something really spectacular. Then, 5 years ago today, I think, California became the second State in the country to adopt a charter school law, and then you became the first of those schools.

In 1994, I passed legislation in Congress to help us support more charter schools. By the end of 1995, there were about 300 charter schools in the country. Today there are 700 charter schools in the country. Many of them have been helped by the program we passed in Washington in 1994.

The historic balanced budget agreement that we just passed into law includes the largest commitment to new investment in edu-